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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to develop a profile of Latino immigrant adults in a California community. Questions guiding the research included: how recently arrived Mexicans and their families integrate themselves into a new community and society; whether or not they do integrate themselves; and how they cope with literacy demands of everyday life. The subjects were 10 parents of elementary school children interviewed in group meetings, and a subset of three families interviewed in Spanish at home. Results suggest that parents and families face numerous challenges in adapting to everyday life in their new communities, linked to but separate from English language learning needs. Parents' literacy needs would not be met well by learning English within the context of an English-as-a-Second-Language program. Enhancement of Spanish literacy is an additional need. Parent concerns include the need to interpret the new culture for themselves and for parenting purposes, suggesting a broader interpretation of literacy. Contains 24 references. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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**LATINO IMMIGRANT LIFE AND LITERACY NEEDS
IN A CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT**

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INTRODUCTION

Demographic projections over the next several decades indicate that Latinos will become the largest minority group in the United States by the middle of the next century. Latino population patterns have outstripped predicted growth rates based on the 1980 Census data. Latinos numbered 19.4 million in 1988, a growth rate of 34 percent since the 1980 Census (Bureau of the Census, 1989). Demographers estimate that the Latino population will number at 54.2 million by the year 2060 if current growth rates continue (Valencia, 1991). These numbers are changing the meaning of the terms minority and majority.

The Latino presence in the U.S. is highly evident in the number of new students who enroll in the schools every fall. This presence is significantly evident in the Southwest, and especially in large states such as California and Texas (Valencia, 1991). Chicanos are the largest non-Anglo cultural group in these states. In addition, however, the number of immigrants from México and other regions of Latin America is also growing rapidly. Most of this rapid growth rate is occurring among young adults and children.

The majority of immigrants in California are from México and Spanish is their primary language. These immigrants and their families are faced with daily challenges tied to essential survival skills. Activities like looking for a job or enrolling a child in a local school are complicated situations for individuals who are new to the United States and who have never had to interact in that manner. Common place activities such as catching a bus or buying groceries become complex processes when a new

language and culture are involved. Because of this, the integration of recently arrived immigrants into new surroundings can be associated with frustrations and isolation. The burdens faced by new Latino immigrant families is also compounded by the frustrations their children and Latino children as a whole face with the U.S. school system.

Educational achievement data for school age Latinos (K-12) indicate that they are not succeeding as well as their Anglo counterparts (Durán, in press). The low academic achievement and school persistence of Latinos in our educational system is part of a broader syndrome of "school failure" for Latinos (Valencia, 1991). Latino children's school failure is a result of conditions which are rooted in the historical, social and economic development of Chicanos in the U.S.. Manifested in the schools, these conditions directly affect academic achievement and persistence in a negative manner. In addition, however, they lead to pervasive, disproportional representation of Latinos in all aspects of schooling (Valencia, 1991). Thus, these conditions lead to a broader exclusion of Chicanos and other Latinos from schooling.

School failure is most evident in the high attrition rates of Chicanos from schools prior to completing a 12th grade education. Data indicate that only about 51 percent of Latinos over 25 years of age have completed a high school diploma, while non-Hispanics of the same age range have a completion rate of 78 percent. This failure to complete high school has a direct bearing on literacy skills.

Literacy acquisition among Latino adolescents and adults outside the school system is not well documented, but has been an area of concern among educators and researchers and is a primary focus of this paper.

Little is known about the literacy development of Latino adults with

limited schooling in the U.S. and specifically about immigrants from México. With very little exposure to English skills and limited formal schooling in their native country, recently arrived Latino adults face many challenges. A fourth grade median level of education tends to be the extent of formal schooling for many of these individuals (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Understanding the range of literacy learning needs of this population requires a sensitive analysis of how language skills development are tied to social experience. Outside formal school settings families establish relationships and interaction styles which lead to language and oral development, an essential precursor of literacy involvement (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The skills needed to function in socially appropriate ways in new settings constitutes literacy ability which extends beyond the narrow definition of reading and writing (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Durán, 1987; Cook-Gumperz, 1986). In the case of immigrant Mexicano families, an analysis of literacy needs to be contextualized in the social and cultural experiences of this particular group of people and the characteristics of the communities they immigrate into. (Guerra, 1991).

The present study sought to develop a profile of Latino immigrant adults in the Mesa Clara and Carlota Community in Santa Bárbara County. Questions guiding the research included; How do recently arrived Mexicanos and their families integrate themselves into a new community and society? Do they integrate themselves at all? How do they cope with the literacy demands of everyday survival? Pursuit of these questions involved gaining information from informants about their daily lives and the coping strategies enacted by informants as they interacted with others in the community. Prominent issues included housing, English language development, employment, family restructuring, and health care. In this

report, ten adult informants were interviewed in Spanish to provide insights into these questions. All of the parents interviewed had children attending a local elementary school (Mesa Clara Elementary School) in the Carlota Union School District. Ethnographic interviews in group meeting sessions were conducted, and in addition, follow-up home interviews were conducted for three families.

RESEARCH SITE

Carlota

The present study took place in the moderately-sized community of Carlota and a subcommunity within it known as Mesa Clara. The population of Carlota totals 70,000 people. Carlota lies north of Los Angeles in Southern California. Carlota is an unincorporated area within the County of *Anacapa*. Of the 2,774 square mile area in the County, approximately 98 percent of the area is unincorporated. The county is divided into six county governance districts (Directory of Industrial business in *Anacapa* County, 1986).

Carlota has a unique ecological setting. The residential community is bounded by the Pacific Ocean on the southwest and the Los Padres National Forest on the north. The California Coastal Highway 101 divides the community into northwest and southeast portions. On the southeast side one can find the downtown area which contains a business district, the airport and a section of low income housing units. A residential community exists in the northwest and a growing electronic and high technology manufacturing section on the west end.

The community is both a semi-industrial and semi-agricultural area with another portion of business being service oriented. A number of

industrial defense companies occupy the region. There are over 60 research and development companies in northwest Carlota, giving rise to its reputation as "Silicon Beach" (Directory of industrial Business in *Anacapa* County, 1986). The largest employer in the region, however, is the a major research univervity.

In large part, Carlota is an upper middle class Anglo community that is slowly undergoing a change in its population. Latinos, the majority of these immigrants from Mexico, are becoming more prominent. But on the surface Carlota is still very "White". This is evident with the lack of ethnic diversity among public official, professionals and school personnel in the area. The high cost of living also deter new families from settling in this region.

Housing is very expensive, especially for working class families and immigrants. In 1990 the median price for a single family home in Santa Bárbara was \$320,000., a price reflecting a 115 percent increase in the value of real estate over the past seven years (*Anacapa* News-Press, March 6, 1991). As a result, many Mexicanos and their families are concentrated in low-income rental units. The high cost of living in the area compounded by the high price of housing has given rise to overcrowded living conditions for many immigrant families. It is not surprising to find as many as ten people in a one-bedroom apartment, since families share apartments to pay the rent required in this area.

Mesa Clara

Mesa Clara is an unincorporated area of *Anacapa* and a subcommunity adjacent to Carlota and the university. It is made up of approximately 11,500 residents, of which at least half are university students. Mesa Clara, or 'M.C.' as the locals call it, is bordered by

university land on three sides, and the ocean on the forth. Less than one square mile in area, Mesa Clara is a self contained community with small shops, restaurants, a drug store and community health clinic. Made up of multiple apartment dwellings, Mesa Clara is heavily impacted by traffic, people and activities. Due to its close proximity to the university and the lack of on-campus housing, Mesa Clara is one of the most densely populated areas in the state.

Mesa Clara is a transient home to many students, low income Indochinese families and immigrant Mexicano families. A section of expensively-priced single family homes exist on the far west end of this community. But, high density apartment housing predominates and overall Mesa Clara remains expensive since no rent control codes or low income housing currently exist. The nine month academic year brings university students and business to the area, while during the summer months, the population noticeably subsides. Given these conditions it is not surprising to find that university students do not interact noticeably with the immigrant families in the area. The lack of association between these two groups isolates and excludes the resident Mexicano families from much relevant survival information and social services. This is the context that fosters the home environment for children who attend the local elementary school.

Mesa Clara Elementary School

Mesa Clara Elementary School is unlike any elementary school found in the state. Its close proximity to the university and the constant arrival of Mexicano and Latino children have created a unique school setting with many challenges.

Mesa Clara Elementary School sits on a 10 acre site and has 18

classrooms. Overcrowded conditions prompted school officials to bus preschoolers and kindergartners to another school campus across the freeway, about 3.5 miles away. In the spring of 1990 M.C. school, had a student population of 670, with a portion of those students housed at the Education Center at Taylor School. Current fall 1991 figures indicate that the school population has risen to 727 with the growth being attributed to "families doubling-up in residential housing and younger families moving into the county" (*Anacapa News-Press*, October 15, 1991).

According to a report to the M.C. School Board the school population is a mixture of "state supported welfare families, agricultural workers, middle and upper-middle class families and university student families". Eighty percent of the families live in rental units and approximately one-third are single parents. Mesa Clara school has a large language minority population, 50 percent of the students speak a language other than English.

Although 21 different languages are spoken in the school, the largest language minority population is "Spanish-speaking". An innovative reading program featuring cooperative learning is being implemented with bilingual students at the school. The program is known as Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition or CIRC (Stevens, Madden, Slavin, and Farnish, 1987). Initial contact with parents in the present study was established as an off-shoot of the CIRC program. The CIRC research team sought to understand the children's home and family conditions. The present project was developed since these issues could only be answered through observations of parents and interviews with parents.

METHODS

A primary goal of the present study is to develop a profile of the

living circumstances and life goals of parents and their related literacy needs. A secondary goal involved analysis of literacy learning programs in the area serving Latinos. This secondary goal includes documenting existing literacy programs in the area with regards to the types of services offered and populations served. The focus of the present paper is the first goal---to begin developing a preliminary profile of the life experiences and goals of Latino adults in Mesa Clara and Carlota with attention to literacy issues.

Parent were selected for participation on the basis of whether they had children participating in the CIRC cooperative learning curriculum at the local elementary school. The CIRC children are part of a national study which is looking at the literacy development of bilingual children through the use of cooperative learning (Prado-Olmos, García, Durán, 1991). Current research illustrates how intergenerational approaches to literacy development can have positive effects on the families of language minorities as children and parents learn skills and styles (Alleksaht-Snider, 1991, Delgado-Gaitan, 1990) and this rationale stimulated choice of a core parent population. However, not all parents involved in the initial study reported here had children in these classrooms.

Parent Meetings

Original contact with the parents occurred at a Parent-teacher meeting in the spring of 1991. The teachers who are participating in the implementation of the CIRC cooperative learning program at two local schools presented the program to the parents of their students (Prado-Olmos, García, Durán, 1991). The parents were informed that they would be contacted in the future to participate in developing a profile of Latino families in the community and their literacy needs. With the help of

Sylvia, a community-school liaison for the school district, parents were identified and two group meetings were scheduled.

Sylvia became our informant and connecting link to the families. She made recommendations on parent participants and she was helpful in locating a meeting place. Her role has been critical to the success of the meetings and has at times shaped some of the initial discussions with the parents. The meetings with the parents have been at an Mesa Clara community center. All of the parents live within walking distance from the center, except two. Of the two who are not walking distance, one has a car and the other gets a ride.

Meetings are typically two hours in duration with specific topics for discussion. The meetings were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The parents' level of confidence in participating was increased by Sylvia's presence. We were able to elicit responses to questions about parents experiences and their perceptions of the "American Culture" (Spindler & Spindler, 1990). Themes for discussion centered around issues that would begin the development of a picture of Latinos in Mesa Clara and Carlota. Because of this the themes and discussion questions were broad and open ended (Spradley, 1980).

The group parent meetings proved informative and began to frame a description of immigrant Latinos in the community at large. It also became apparent that if we were to have access to personal experiences in any detail, it would have to be obtained through one-on-one household interviews. Since all of the parents that have participated are women, except for one male who came to our first meeting, arranging a time to meet with the female participants never presented itself as a problem. Interviews were scheduled at convenient times in the home of the

participants.

RESULTS

Accounts of Families

The experiences and perceptions of our 10 participants began to cluster around themes from the outset. We conducted analyses of these themes and how themes relate to domains of everyday experiences using ethnographic analytic techniques (Spradley, 1979). Five themes emerged as 'most' important from the broad and open-ended group discussions. In the order of importance, they included 1) housing, 2) English language development, 3) employment, 4) family restructuring, and 5) health care.

Participants' individual contributions to these themes will be referred to by a numerical identification code in order to make specific reference to the persons and their families. Table 1 shows a matrix of some important characteristics of participants and their families. Notice all are women, except for one man who only came to our first meeting. One of the women is a single parent. Although it was clearly stated that families were invited, those who attended the meetings were predominantly women. Child care was provided and hence there were always children in the vicinity of the meeting area.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Housing

Obtaining housing was a complex social process for our informants

and usually required the guidance of someone who had gone through the same process. Issues related to housing fell into 3 sub categories: locating housing, arranging leases and rentals, and maintaining the unit for living purposes.

Locating housing is difficult. Since Carlota has no Spanish news media, people are dependent on information through word of mouth. Although two recently established newspapers, *Las Noticias* and *Voz Popular* provide minimal community information on a bimonthly or quarterly basis, no continuous, daily coverage is available. The local television channel provides Spanish translation, but not until 11:30 p.m. when few persons can watch. Thus, for example, according to Alva Jimenez, parent #10, looking for housing often times required walking up and down the streets and looking for signs and asking people about rentals.

Arranging leases and rentals is another difficult stage in this process. Of the Mexicana participants in the study, all but 2 have 3 or more children an average family size of 5. One or more families end up residing in a one or two-bedroom apartment requiring from \$500 to \$1000 monthly rent in Mesa Clara and Carlota. The larger the family the more difficult it is to secure housing. When asked, ¿Comó le hacen ustedes cuando van a rentar un departamento? (What do you do when you are going to rent an apartment?). AJ, parent #8, answered:

"¡Que no tenemos que hacer para rentar! O sea es un problema, es un verdadero problema. Porque en primer lugar el tener tanto dinero que le piden a uno para el deposito y la renta. Tener que juntar uno ese dinero es difícil. Más para una familia de más de tres personas. A menos para mi si, si. Por eso uno no se mueve con frecuencia." (You see it's a problem, a real problem. In the first place for a

person to have enough money they [landlords] request for deposit as well as the rent. To have to save enough money is difficult. More so for a family of more than 3 persons. At least for me it is. That's why we can't move with frequency or ease.)

Since all of the participants are Spanish speaking, they have difficulty communicating with the landlords or apartment managers. Many find assistance through bilingual gardeners or other such mediators who work or live in the community and are bilingual. When asked how she communicated with her apartment manager, AM, parent #9 said, "a puras señas" (through gestures).

The final stage in formalizing a housing contract can have unanticipated and problematic consequences for persons such as those participating in this study. Lease agreements and contracts may be signed without any understanding of the binding agreements. AJ, parent #8 put it best when she said:

"Pero la verdad a veces firma uno sin saber que firma. Pero, pues, me urgía, ¿verdad? rentar el apartamento." (It's true sometimes one signs without knowing what you sign. But, it was urgent, right?, to rent an apartment.)

Maintaining residency in the apartment is even more difficult. The dilapidated conditions of apartments in the area are a concern. Some complained about violation of their rights. Parent #7 says her manager would go into the apartments unannounced and browse or turn the radio down if it was loud. Many spoke of blatant discrimination against them and their children. Some tenants are asked not to let the children play outside and that the children are not to make any noise. While others have been evicted by landlords because of their children, most expressed

frustration for being turned down for housing because of the children, which is a violation of state policy. All the participants would find it difficult to file a grievance, much less do it alone and pursue it. Often families live together to meet the prices of the rental units which leaves them vulnerable and open to eviction on a moments notice since shared multiple households in a housing unit may be prohibited by landlords.

Obtaining housing may be facilitated by an immigrant spouse who settles in a community prior to arrival of other family members. We found, for example, that for at least three participants; OR #1, LR #5 and CM #6, housing was secured by their husbands who had lived and worked here before their wives and children arrived. But housing is only one of the many issues immigrants are forced to contend with when they arrive.

English Language Development

Concern about learning English outside of formal schooling was high on the minds of parents. Many would go to school to learn English if they had the time, but a class focusing on learning English is not necessarily well-suited to meet everyday survival needs. For purposes of survival, they believe that they need English literacy skills related to the work place, for buying groceries and other commercial interactions, and for interacting with their children's teacher at school.

Proficiency in English presented itself as a problem for all of the respondents. Everyone in the group mention that it was important to learn the language yet each person had different perceptions of what "learning English" meant. A view commonly held was that English would improve your life chances for "better" opportunities in the U.S.. What 'better' meant varied across respondents. Olivia Flavela, parent #10, commented that she

would like her children to remain in the U.S. so they could learn English and get a better job and not suffer like she had in México.

One observation was that the work place did not allow the participants to develop English skills. As parent #4, explained:

"Uno nomás lo [ingles] agarra pues así, ¿pues lo oye palabras verdad? Pero como uno trabaja en rancho no se le pega mucho. Todo el tiempo convive con la misma gente. Nada más cuando sale uno por aca." (One just picks it [English] up like that, well what you hear of words, right? But like some [of us] work on ranches you don't get much. You interact with the same people. Only when one goes out over here.)

Parents judged they had little opportunities for securing any job or a better job without knowing English. Knowing English also meant giving the women participating in the study a voice in other matters. Unless they could communicate, they were silent. Ana Madera, parent #9 expressed, "Y me gustaría a mi también aprender inglés para comunicarme más con la gente." (I would also like to learn more English to communicate more with people.)

All of the participants expressed an interest in attending ESL classes. For many, however, this is not a possibility. Olga Rios, parent #1, and Victor and Lupe Robledo, parents #4 & 5, at the time of our group meetings were living together with yet another couple. A total of 9 adults and 5 children lived in a two-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment in Mesa Clara which cost \$695. Life for them evolved around getting all of the children off to school, men off to work, meals on time for the family, and trying to stay out of sight of the apartment manager so as not to be evicted. Yet they acknowledged that developing English skills would

improve their life chances.

ESL classes are not always located close to the homes of families. They require a lot of paper work, documentation (i.e. Social Security cards) and examinations. This is a deterrent for Mexicano families who have problems in obtaining these services and resources. Catalina Meza, parent #6, had been attending an ESL class at a local high school. It is about 5 miles away from her home. She would catch a ride with her neighbor, but the neighbor has since moved. She would like to continue going to evening classes 7:30-9:30 p.m., three nights a week, but she now has no way of getting to the site. She can take the bus, but buses stop running at 9 p.m., and class is let out 9:30 p.m.. So, she does not attend classes any more. Alva Jimenez, parent #8, states the importance of learning and her personal effort to achieve that goal:

"Si me interesa mucho aprender el inglés. Yo trato de, de aprender lo más que puedo porque no voy a la escuela. Pero en casa pongo mis 'casete' o con los niños hablo, pero pienso que si necesario que uno aprenda el idioma." (I am interested in learning English. I try to learn as much as I can since I don't go to school. But at home I play my cassettes [English] or with the kids I practice, but I believe it is necessary that one learn the language.)

Personal motivation and efforts to learn English can be impeded by cultural and social factors. Some informants indicated that an ESL class had discouraged the women from attending classes. They spoke vividly of accounts in which they had found themselves in classes where they felt embarrassment and other negative feelings because of not performing as fluently as other students. They said they would like to have opportunity to enroll in ESL and literacy classes with a variety of levels and would

need a resource person to assist them. They also felt that class schedules should better accommodate to their family's schedules and family needs.

Employment

Finding work, once the family has been settled into a home is another trying experience for these women. Among the ten who attended our first parents' meeting, all but one, did not work, yet all expressed a desire to find a better job. Further, the participants had specific ideas about the kind of job they would like. ES, parent #7, had held her job at a fast food restaurant for two years. The rest either had not been able to find a job, had been laid off, or had refused to work for the pay offered to them. The high expectations that these women had of life in the U.S. and its employment opportunities changed once they found themselves in less fulfilling situations than they had expected.

Filing an application for a job was a significant challenge for all of the women. First, it required having some knowledge of available jobs in the community and what kind of work experience was required. In addition, the person must have coped with the requisite transportation needs. She had to be able to get to where the job was located. This typically requires the use of public transportation. This use of transportation was impeded by not speaking English. How do you communicate with the bus driver about schedules, routes and destinations? Finally, once a woman got to the work place or job application site they had in mind they were asked to fill out an application, in English. They were then told they would be called if a position opened up. The whole process is thus trying, intimidating and sought with few positive results.

Comments made by CM, parent #6, one of the most schooled

informants, makes these findings concrete. She stated:

"¡Y aquí mejor no salgo! Me estoy encerrada en mi casa porque no se preguntar." (And here I don't go out! I stay locked inside my house because I don't know how to ask [help]).

She further went on to state about looking for a job:

"Tiene uno que agarrar trabajos que son muy bajos a los que ha estudiado uno. Digamos yo estudie primaria, secundaria, y que la prepa y que estudie comercio, se escribir a máquina, bueno. ¡Y aquí no puedo hacer nada! ¡Me doy cuenta que no puedo hacer nada porque no se inglés! ¿En qué voy a trabajar? Limpiando casas, cuidando niños, o haciendo cosas que, que no me me requieran saber inglés. Aunque yo sepa hacer otras cosas no las puedo poner en práctica. Como hay muchos contadores, muchos ingenieros, que estan titulados en México, y que son buenos ingenieros y que aquí [estan como] en operadores de una máquina, de cocinero y así, porque no saben el inglés." (One has to take jobs that underemploy you for the education you have obtained. Let's say, like I studied elementary, secondary, college preparatory, and professional business, I know how to use a typewriter, well. And here I don't know how to do anything. I have noticed that I can't do anything because I don't know English. What am I going to work in? Cleaning houses, baby sitting, or anything else that does not require knowing English. Even though I have other talents, I can't put them into practice. There are many accountants, many engineers who have degrees in México, ..and they are good engineers ..and here they are machine operators, cooks and the like, why, because they don't know English.)

While finding a job was difficult for all the women respondent, those that find jobs are faced with job discrimination, violation of rights in the work place and lack of resources for them to communicate to proper persons who can assist them. LZ, parent #2, says she quit her sewing job because she was being paid according to the garments completed. She explained that she was spending more of her time and effort to complete a garment than appropriate given the amount of income she was generating. She decided to leave the job because it did not pay her sufficiently to meet daily necessities and to care for her daughter. On an another occasion, LZ was laid off her work at a fast food restaurant because the previous worker returned. She was simply told not to show up the next day with no advance notice about possibly losing her job.

Working outside the home has changed the roles of the women in their families. In México, four women in the study did not work: #1, #3, #5, & #9. In contrast these women all expressed desire to work in what ever was available once they came to the United States. What does this mean for the restructuring of family patterns? How do families cope with the change in roles and the expectations of all family members?

Family Restructuring

The families of the respondents were changed overnight by the simple fact that they were now in a new country. Relationships between husbands and wives, children and parents, children and peers were no longer the same as those that were established in México. In Mesa Clara and Carlota the participants found that it was necessary that both parents work. Working outside of the home has meant less hours with the children and less interactions with the family.

Since more than one family end up living together once they arrive in the U.S. they have found it difficult to continue family life as it was previously. Behavioral discipline of the children is a great concern. When there are more than 5 children in a two-bedroom apartment, and not all of the children belong to one parent, the children do not get the individualized attention and guidance desirable. The privacy of the family is curtailed. Sylvia the home-school liaison says it is not uncommon to have more than one family residing in a small apartment where living quarters are public, and where children and adults sleep on the floor. As a result children "hear and see a lot of things that they are not supposed to."

Respondents reported a fragmentation and/or disintegration of traditional family values in México. Families or individuals that have established themselves here, were reported, to have refused a helping hand to newly arrived family members. The cost of living is high so that those families that open up their doors to recent arrivals can only take in recent arrivals for a few days until they are forced to move them out. As Catalina Meza, parent #6, stated, "Si se gana en dolares, pero también se gasta en dolares." (Yes one earns dollars, yet one has to spend in dollars.)

Not all of the parents envision staying in the area. Some have spoken about leaving the area and returning to México. Ana Madera, parent #9, said that staying in the U.S. was like a 'punishment' and not the paradise she was led to believe. She stated, "Pues no porque uno tiene de su familia alla. Es una de las cosas que pues a uno se le hace más difícil." (Well no, one has their family over there. This is one of the things that makes it most difficult.) Families have been separated from vital members like the grandparents or children in choosing to come to the U.S.. Others, however, have come to the U.S. to unite with their families as in the case of

parents #1, #5, and #6. So the circumstances were unique for each of the families and only certain general conclusions could be made. What is certain is that the family nucleus is important and that the parents have a great interest in their children's schooling.

Health Care

Routine health care, dental care and eye examinations are non-existent for these families. Many rely on services provided through the schools, but this leaves the adults without any resources. The respondents, spouses and their children depend on public health services sought for use only in emergency or health crisis situations. Elvia Santos, parent #7, had to go to a local emergency room for chest pains and difficulty breathing. There was no one there who could speak Spanish, so she had to wait until a hospital staff person was found who could assist her. The assisting staff person had limited knowledge of Spanish and was unable to explain Elvia's condition fully. As a result Elvia was sent home after the examination not understanding fully the medical diagnosis. LZ, parent #2, reported she had been hospitalized and said that she had a pleasant experience, though she revealed that she began to feel comfortable about her situation only after she was assisted by a bilingual cleaning woman who happened to be at the hospital.

The public medical clinics in the area have signs which read "If you do not speak English bring your interpreter." And as AJ, parent #8, put it, "y luego hay algunos que le hacen el favor de mala gana lo tratan a uno mal." (and then there are those who do the service reluctantly, and are impolite.) This was in regards to health services and her personal experiences.

DISCUSSION

The immigrant Latino families that have been described in this report have numerous critical survival needs that are being impeded by their ability to communicate within their everyday community contexts. Learning to speak and write English is a desired goal for all the parents interviewed, but their literacy needs and potential for literacy development are more complex. The interview findings suggest that parents and families face numerous challenges and problems in adapting to everyday life in their new community. These problems are tied to but separate from learning English in its narrow sense. The literacy needs of parents would not be met very well by learning English within the contexts of an ESL program. Further, while our interviews have not explored the issue in depth, it appears that parents would benefit from opportunities to enhance their Spanish language literacy as well.

The findings reported in this preliminary study and their relevance for literacy training make better sense when connected with findings of other studies of literacy, and in particular, when connected to theoretical perspectives viewing literacy as a social commodity. Bourdieu (1991), e.g., describes literacy as cultural capital. According to his views, everyday social institutions and networks of social prestige and power, develop special forms of discourse shared among members of these networks. Competence in these forms of discourse is necessary in order to access the rights and privileges represented by institutions. Thus, immigrants' ability to receive services from institutions in everyday life becomes manifest in their communicative competence appropriate to the discourse of institutions and the display of this competence *in situo*. The situated

nature of communication in turn is related to interlocutors' negotiated construal of their own self-identity (Gumperz, 1982).

The Latino parents interviewed in this study face these problems of discourse competence as cultural capital. In pursuing health care, employment, housing, everyday purchases, etc., they must negotiate their self-identity as outsiders with a community that largely views them this way and also views them as socially inferior. Consistent with widespread research findings in the field of bilingualism, our parents report discrimination against them because they are not proficient in English, the language of social power (Ferguson, 1959).

In interpreting the literacy challenges of our immigrant informants, it is also helpful to consider literacy more broadly. Specifically it is useful to consider literacy as also encompassing the ability to interpret culture and its social belief systems. The immigrant Latino parents in this study confront new belief systems that create a discontinuity in their pursuit of survival and family development. In effect, valuable sociocultural literacies learned in Mexico become challenged or dysfunctional in U.S. contexts. A frequent theme among interviewees concerned a sense of cultural alienation from life in the US. Esteemed customs and social values of "Mexicanos" marking a proper upbringing, such as opening one's home to visitors, were violated in the U.S. as families developed coping strategies to conserve their meager financial resources. Another example is the lack of family and friends in the U.S. to help with everyday problems in contrast to life in a Mexican setting where friends and family are expected to watch out and care for each other. Other cultural discontinuities and trauma were mentioned occasionally by families and deserve further in depth study. For example, parents mentioned need for new strategies to

"parent" their children in light of the influences of U.S. culture and U.S. social problems such as high rates of drug abuse and gangs.

The aforementioned broader literacy needs of Latino parents will be analyzed in more detail in terms of demands for particular language skills in the course of our project. As we continue our project we want to understand ways in which the Spanish and English competencies of informants might be developed so that community members are empowered to better attain their familial and personal goals. Drawing on literacy research on Latino families by investigators such Moll and Greenburg (1990), Farr and Guerra (in preparation), and Delagado-Gaitan (1990), we wish to explore how the literacy development of parents and their children may be stimulated by parents who form their own community self-help networks addressing everyday problems of survival and life-enhancement.

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Appendix A

REUNION DE PADRES LATINOS EN MESA CLARA

Miércoles, 15 de mayo de 1991

- I. Introducciones
- II. Objetivos del proyecto el aprendizaje del español y del inglés.
- III. Introducción de familias.
- IV. Información sobre los siguientes temas:
 1. Maestro o maestra de sus hijas o hijos.
 2. Tiempo de residencia en la comunidad.
 3. Comunicación con las escuelas.
 4. Familias en el hogar.
 5. Viviendas, oportunidades y condiciones.
 6. Trabajos, oportunidades y condiciones.
 7. Comunicación en inglés en sitios públicos o con agencias de servicios públicos (hospital, banco, mercado). ¿Quién les ayuda?
 8. Cursos de inglés. ¿Dónde?
 9. ¿Qué les gustaría ver que ocuriera en la comunidad?
 10. ¿Qué servicios para la familia faltan?
 11. Satisfacción con sus trabajos. ¿Qué tipo de trabajo les gustaría hacer?
- V. Reunión futura.
- VI. Fin

Appendix B

REUNION DE PADRES LATINOS EN MESA CLARA

Miércoles, 5 de junio de 1991

- I. Introducciones:
- II. Discusión de la última reunión:
 - Educación en la secundaria
 - Servicios Medicos
 - Viviendas
 - Trabajos
 - Financiamientos y ahorros
 - Medios de comunicación
 - Inglés como segundo idioma
- III. Temas de discusión:
 - ¿Cuál era la percepción (idea) que ustedes tenían de los Estados Unidos antes de venir de México?
 - ¿Qué es lo que encontraron al llegar a los Estados Unidos? Sus impresiones y sus reacciones.
 - ¿Cómo ha cambiao esa percepción?
 - Si alguien le pide información sobre la vida cotidiana en la sociedad norte americana, ¿cómo describirían un retrato de lo que es vivir aquí?
- IV. Reunión

Appendix C

REUNION DE PADRES LATINOS EN CARLOTA

lunes, 7 de octubre de 1991

Introducciones

Introducciones de padres

Discusión de las últimas reuniones

Educación en la secundaria	Servicios Medicos
Viviendas	Trabajos
Financiamientos y ahorros	Medios de comunicación
Inglés como segundo idioma	Percepciones de los Estados Unidos
La vida en los Estados Unidos	

Temas de discusión

¿Cómo se estan ajustando sus hijas/os en la escuela este año escolar? ¿En qué escuela se encuentran? ¿Quienes son sus maestras/os? ¿Qué cambios encuentran en sus hijas/os?

¿Qué peinsan que va a ocurrir en sus vidas el proximo años?
 ¿Donde se van a encontrar, qué cosas van a estar haciendo?
 ¿Qué cosas les gustría que ocurrieran?

Reunión futura:

¿Cuales temas les gustaría que discutieramos en estas reuniones?

I.D. Number	Name	Sex	State Immigrated From	Number of Children	Time in U.S.	Case Study	
1	Olga Rios	F	Michoacan	3		5 months	Participant
2	Luna Zuñiga	F	Michoacan	3 (1 in the U.S.)		1 year	
3	Ana Rodriguez	F	Zacatecas	3		2 years & 7 months	
4	Victor Robledo	M	Michoacan	1			
5	Lupe Robledo	F	Michoacan	1		5 months	Participant
6	Catalina Meza	F	Jalisco	3		5 months	Participant
7	Elvia Santos	F	Jalisco	3		2 years	
8	Alva Jimenez	F	Morelos	4		3 years	
9	Ana Madera	F	Jalisco	1		5 months	
10	Olivia Flavella	F	Guanajuato	8		1 year 3 months	

Table 1
□

Participant Year 1 study

November 1991

Reyna G. García